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ABSTRACT

Certain world characteristics can no longer be ignored when curriculum is devised for schools and teacher education. The rate of change in our country, and globally, is accelerating. Taking a reconstructionist view, there are certain directions that education should take with respect to content, methodology, values education, and skills. Educators and schools cannot teach students everything they need to know. Schools must not be afraid, however, to confront controversial issues and search for answers, and education's content must be conceptual rather than focused on unrelated facts. Students must learn to inquire, test hypotheses about causes and results, and test consequences of their beliefs. They must be encouraged to think of problems as issues which contain multiple interacting variables, and, given the nature and impact of public policy decisions, education must be interdisciplinary. Moral and value questions must take their place at the heart of the school curriculum, because certain values are necessary to sustain a global society. In a global society of diversity, conflict, and uncertainty, education must provide support for the individual. If students are to participate more effectively in future society, they should learn to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences by developing interpersonal skills. (JMK)

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The Future: Implications For The Learner

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The kinds of affective and cognitive learnings which will promote the future survival of the learner depend upon the kind of future one envisions. If the present, and its predicted direction into the future, serve as a set of assumptions for the kind of education that is desirable, then the logic of the situation becomes clear. Education derives its guiding principles from the nature of the future as we believe it will be and as we would have it. If technology and science can provide ultimate solutions to the global problems we face, as Herman Kahn (1976) would suggest, then education should be aimed at maintaining or accelerating the perceived present growth and the social economic and political systems which generated it. If, on the other hand, one takes a somewhat more pessimistic view of the future, at least to the extent that basic changes in mans' behavior are required if we are to survive, then quite different kinds of learnings are necessary if schools and teachers are to positively impact the future.

John Kenneth Galbraith has stated that--

> (m)an, at least when educated is a pessimist. He believes it safer not to reflect on his achievements; Jove is known to strike such people down. Dangers, uncompleted tasks, failures remain in his mind. (Galbraith, 1977, 324).

What are the dangers, the uncompleted tasks and the failures that can guide an educational agenda into the future? Certain world characteristics can no longer be ignored when curriculum is devised for schools and teacher education. The rate of change in our country, and globally, is accelerating. Population crowding, hunger, resource depletion and overconsumption demand our attention. There are pressures for global equity in the distribution of power, income, food, wealth and human rights. Yet

there is less agreement, for example, on what equity means and what changes are necessary. There is an increased complexity of problems and issues, and an interrelatedness of causes and alternative solutions which sometimes cause feelings of helplessness. So where do we begin?

I should first point out that this is a reconstructionist view which entails assessing where we are, arriving at a consensus about where we should go, and developing the best educational system to get us there. It is also a practical view which suggests that change is here to stay and the only choice is whether education should lead or follow.

First, there must be an acceptance of the idea that American society, and the planet, are in both a short-term and long-term state of crisis. Therefore, the role of education should be to prepare for these challenges. Society must recognize that something is wrong before any reconstruction is possible. In the past we have tended to look forward to a bigger and flashier version of the present. Unless we recognize that the crisis exists, we will not ask "What can we do?". Once we ask "What can we do?", we must also recognize the need for social invention, including the need for education that is fundamentally different from the past.

Secondly, since our habit as people is to seek solutions, we must accept the idea that the problems or issues are complex, interrelated, and not given to simple answers. An understanding of the contemporary threats to existance must lead us to propose and examine alternative solutions and their varied consequences if we are to behave intelligently.

Thirdly, we must maintain the belief that people have the power to make things better. Any belief that the future is predetermined or that people, when informed, are incapable of making good and reasonable judgments, will not aid schools or teachers in directing education toward a more reasoned future.

Given these three starting assumptions, the following are some directions education should take with respect to content, methodology, value education, and skills.

Content

Educators and schools cannot teach students everything that they need to know. Viewed another way, not all facts and subject matter content are worthy of being passed on to learners. The following are some guidelines for content section.

1. Schools must not be afraid to confront controversial issues and search for answers. Social and economic equity, hunger, the arms race, social change, racial discrimination and the use of power, for example, are not the usual topics which are encouraged in the school curriculum. They must be if we expect people to make reasonable decisions in these areas. This means that public policy questions ("What should be done about X") must make up a much larger share of the curriculum. By their very nature, public policy questions tend to be controversial.

2. The content of education must be conceptual rather than focusing on unrelated facts. Particularly in the sciences and social studies students need to understand categories, groups and characteristics of data and ideas. They need to be able to use and apply the concepts they have learned to new situations. For too long we have assumed that factual knowledge is always useful if we can memorize it and hang on to it long enough. Instead we must concede that some facts are not worth knowing. Only those facts that help us understand, that is to either conceptualize or test beliefs, are worthy of being included in the curriculum.

Methodology

The process of teaching and learning consistent with a reconstructed view of the future is one which attempts to develop students intellectual skills so that they can analyze their own experience, solve problems, and inquire into the nature and causes of things. As John Dewey has said, the role of the teacher is to create doubt and help the student move toward tested beliefs. (Dewey, 1933, 9)

1. Students must learn to inquire, to test hypotheses about causes and results, and test the consequences of their beliefs. Students must have the opportunity to gather and interpret data, form generalizations, predict consequences, and make decisions. These intellectual skills are generic and situation free; they encourage intellectual flexibility and the long term ability to make sense of what may appear to be an incoherent and chaotic world. The student must be encouraged to ask "Why do I believe X?".

2. Students must be encouraged to think of problems as issues which contain multiple interacting variables, where any decision with respect to the problem has consequences which are felt far from the point where the solution is applied. In a global society we must begin to realize that linear thinking tends to close out the lateral impact of public policy decisions on a very wide range of other problems, countries and cultures. Students must be encouraged to think about and analyze problems, concepts, hypotheses, and other beliefs with respect to times and places other than their own. In short, the vision of students must be encouraged to be less ethnocentric and less tied to their own local or national interests. We must view ourselves as world citizens and begin examining the global bases for problem solving. The world order must be conceptualized as a single highly diverse and increasingly complex system in which the impact of an event that takes place anywhere in the world will be felt everywhere in the world. An increasing number of decisions affect many cultures, many countries, and, perhaps, many generations. (Becker, 1980, 38)

3. Given the nature and impact of public policy decisions, education must be interdisciplinary. Education cannot be subject-centered, essentialist, or bounded by artificial disciplinary fences. Problems or issues to be resolved can no longer be neatly packaged in disciplinary categories; rather, students must be able to apply knowledge from all sources to the resolution of problems and arrival at tested beliefs.

Values

Education is never value free. Education for the future must help students acquire the values that will sustain them in an uncertain and changing world as well as the ability to inquire into the values of themselves and others.

1. Moral and value questions must take their place at the heart of the school curriculum. Students must be encouraged to take value positions, rank and weigh the consequences of their value beliefs, and build their value beliefs into a consistent and integrated whole. Knowledge of the arms race, international debt, or population patterns cannot be separated from the other question -- "What should we do?" The process of justifying value beliefs is critical to decisionmaking because knowledge and understanding will not, by themselves, provide right answers. Ultimately, as Kohlberg has pointed out, the goal of moral choice is for individuals to make a decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles. (Kohlberg, 1968)

2. Values, as standards of conduct or worth, are our judgments about what is good, right, or desirable. Certain values are necessary to sustain a global society. A fundamental belief in the dignity and worth of all human beings and in the right of individuals and cultures to make their own choices are critical. Human dignity is not easy to define but it certainly includes a respect for human life and attention to what might be called general democratic ideals. (Oliver-Shaver, 1966, 24) These would include respect for other life styles and cultures, and the development of a general sense of community.

3. In a global society of diversity, conflict and uncertainty, education must provide suppoort for the individual. Individual students must be helped to have less fear of the unknown. There must be a concern for the mental health of individuals and learning must be individualized and humane. In a rapidly changing society personal isolation and alienation are highly possible. Mounting tension, intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts are more likely. In this environment, it is important that the school help the child to develop a self-concept that includes a feeling of self-worth and the power to control events that shape one's own life. There must also be a recognition by schools and teachers that individuals learn, grow, and develop at different rates. Individuals must be allowed to develop diverse self-concepts and perspectives of themselves with respect to the large community. Emphasis must shift from grouping and grading students to diagnosis of individual learning needs, and the acceptance of wide ranges of performance.

Skills

The future skills which will enable students to more effectively participate in society are those which will foster better communication with others and the ability to deal interpersonally with a variety of people from other cultures.

1. Students must learn to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. If one is to participate effectively in a larger society, one must be able to state problems and participate in a free and open debate or inquiry into solutions. This means that there must also be an increased ability and opportunity for students to communicate with adults in the large society. Value must also be placed on varied means of communication including artistic expression of all kinds.

2. There must be an emphasis on interpersonal skills including conflict resolution, listening, and seeking concensus on issues. Individuals must be encouraged to confront problems, and they will, therefore, confront each other over ideas. The skill with which they handle these confrontations will be measured by the degree of personal hostility and turmoil which results.

Conclusions

Some forty national commissions or study groups as well as about one hundred-fifty state commisions, are either in the process or have already reported on needed reforms in American education. Unfortunately, at least to date, few of these reports have given any attention to the kinds of learnings that are appropriate for living in a global age, or the kinds of understandings that are necessary to cope with the trends that are drawing us into the future. Ernest Boyer, in High School, recommends that "students...explore the critical role that technology has played throughout history and develop the capacity to make responsible judgments about its use." (Boyer, 1983, 111) The recommendation in the same study that students should complete a service requirement that would involve them in volunteer work in the community is another step in the right direction (Goodlad, 1983, 209). John Goodlad, in A Place Called School, notes that the classroom teacher's inability "to assure understanding and appreciation of the United States as a nation among nations and its relationship to the social, political, and economic systems of other countries...merely reflects ambiguity in the surrounding society regarding our nation's role in a world of growing independence the world in which our young people live and will live as adults." (Goodlad, 213) Some other

reports make brief mention of the need to emphasize problem solving and higher level cognitive skills in school curricula. Little or no attention is given to the nature of global society in the future which might dictate the nature of schools in the present. Unfortunately, most of the reports look only to the past for guidance as to what schools should be in the present and future. Until we develop a conceptualization of the future as we would have it, and use their conceptualization to guide education in the present, no educational reform of any significance is really possible.

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